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Providing Care to the Incontinent

Providing care to incontinent patients or loved ones requires, above all, patience, compassion, and a willingness to take on the challenges that incontinence poses. Whether you are a caregiver in an institution or with a loved one at home, there are a variety of strategies that can be employed to keep patients dry.

First, it is important to be sensitive to the patient's embarrassment about their incontinence and treat them with compassion. In order to provide an individualized plan that will suit the patient, it is important to conduct a thorough assessment of the patient's physical condition and their environment. A physical assessment should take note of factors that may be contributing to incontinence, such as constipation, fluid intake or ease of mobility. Look for barriers in their environment that may make it more difficult for them to get to a bathroom, such as clothing, proximity to a toilet at night, and furniture layout. In addition, it is helpful to keep a bladder record of how frequently they urinate.

Scheduled Toileting

One of the most common ways to achieve continence is to put patients on a toileting schedule. With information from a bladder record of how frequently a patient needs to urinate, it is easier to set up a toileting schedule that accommodates them. While this treatment does not cure incontinence, staying on a regular schedule can help keep a person dry and comfortable. In institutional settings, it may be difficult because of limited staff resources to get patients to the bathroom every time if they urinate frequently. However, there are many products that can be used if the patient is immobile, such as female urinals, external collection devices, bedside commodes and toilet seat elevators.

Incontinence Undergarments

There are a variety of undergarments that can be used in combination with a toileting schedule to make patients as comfortable as possible. Undergarments may be disposable or cloth, come in the form of absorbent pads or pull-on like underpants. Be sure to refer to undergarments as "protective wear" rather than as diapers, as the term diapers may be offensive to patients. Discuss preferences with the patient in private and make sure the undergarment is fitted properly to prevent leaking and provide comfort. If using adhesive pads, avoid touching the adhesive directly: hand

Tips for Caregivers

Experts recommend that a thorough assessment of an incontinent loved one or patient be performed by a qualified healthcare specialist. These tips may also provide help to those caring for someone suffering from incontinence.

- » **Develop a scheduled toileting plan.**
- » **Monitor the diet and fluid intake. Not drinking enough fluid may irritate the bladder and increase incontinence. Caffeine, alcohol and aspartame can also irritate the bladder.**
- » **Assess bowel regularity. Fecal constipation can make urinary incontinence worse.**
- » **Check absorbent pads regularly. Look into getting incontinence devices, like female urinals or toilet elevators.**
- » **Use disposable or reusable underpads to protect the bed and chairs.**
- » **Use a pH-balanced incontinence wash for cleaning up accidents. Soap is harsh and may irritate the skin.**
- » **It is best to use disposable wipes to clean up after incontinent episodes.**
- » **Putting an odor eliminator or kitty litter under the bed may reduce odor.**

lotions and deodorants can reduce adhesion. Investigate whether these products are covered under the patient's health insurance. Medicare and other major insurers usually pay for many of these products in a limited monthly amount. However, some absorbent products found in grocery or drug stores are considered personal hygiene products and are not paid for by insurers.

Low-intensity, regular exercise

In addition to the obvious benefits of exercise, maintaining or improving patients' activity level may serve to help them stay dry as well. Ensuring regular activity will help keep them mobile so they are more capable of getting to the bathroom.